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**BOB CONSIDINE**

## Powers—Operation Overflight

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a two-part column by Bob Considine about Francis Gary Powers and his May 1, 1960 U-2 flight over Russia. Part two will run tomorrow.)

Francis Gary Powers doesn't look like a spy. He looks more like a Midwestern insurance man. His voice is as quiet as his clothes.

If they ever make a movie of his extraordinary life, he won't be chosen to play the dramatic role of a man who was shot down over the Soviet Union, who broke up a Summit Meeting, and became the most celebrated prisoner in the world.

Powers is in New York in connection with the publication next week of his book, "Operation Overflight," written with a good pro named Curt Gentry and published by Holt, Rinehart, Winston.

"I HAVE NEVER thought of myself as a spy . . ." his book begins. But he was, of course, and a pioneer in the transition of the old cloak-and-dagger technique to today's sophisticated electronic eye-in-the-sky.

The other night over a drink in Shor's, Powers spoke at length about his bygone troubles. He had more than one man's share of same.

"People ask me why I got into the business in the first place," he said in his earnest way. It was a business which President Eisenhower, after having been bitterly bawled out by Khrushchev, called "a distasteful but vital necessity."

"WELL," POWERS continued, "I felt our nation was getting pushed around and I was glad that somebody in high authority had the courage to initiate such an operation.

"If it hadn't been for the U-2's we might never have realized that the Soviets were putting over a big hoax on us — the phony threat of a big Russian bomber force.

"We discovered in the course of our overflights that they were moving their limited number of big bombers from this field to that so as to make it appear to any ground observer that it was a tremendous force.

"WHAT THEY WERE really concentrating on at that time was building intercontinental missiles, not bombers.

"They obviously hoped that we'd respond by building a huge defense apparatus against the

bomber threat: fighters, interceptors, flak guns and missiles — all useless, of course, against an ICBM attack.

"We caught on, in time, and stepped up our own long-range missile programs. The U-2's can be said to have averted a possible third world war."

CONTROVERSY HAS SWIRLED around Powers since that fateful May 1, 1960. At his subsequent public trial in Moscow, the correspondent on my right said — as Powers recited his stilted confession — "That poor, poor guy." The reporter on my left said, through gritted teeth, "If I had a gun I'd shoot that S.O.B.!"

The day John Glenn was given his tickertape parade in New York, after becoming the first American to spin around the world in space, a group of Air Force men looked down on the happy scene from an office window.

"Gary Powers ought to be in that parade, sitting beside John," a World War II ace said. "Gary's a hero, too, and John would be the first to agree."

POWERS' EMPLOYERS, the C.I.A., paid him \$25,000 a year to fly the U-2. It was a sorely inadequate sum, considering the job. Before each mission he breathed 100 per cent pure oxygen for four hours, to destroy his system's nitrogen bubbles which — at great altitude — might have given him a lethal case of the "bends."

On top of that hard preparation period came the flight itself, sometimes lasting eight or ten hours in a cockpit jammed with electronic and photographic gear.

If his single engine conked out, the only prospects were imprisonment or a death sentence. The C.I.A. provided him with a gun, a knife, and an even surer means of killing himself — a cyanide pill.

He contemplated taking that latter route to eternity, as his parachute slowly approached the ground near Sverdlovsk, the city where the Bolsheviks slaughtered Czar Nicholas and his family. But, looking down, he noticed that many of those awaiting his imminent touchdown were children, all delighted to be present at an event that shook the world.

(TO BE CONTINUED)